

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 13, 2006

Contact:
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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will hold a public, on-the-record forum on Tuesday, October 17 on "The Bangladesh Elections: Promoting Democracy and Protecting Rights in a Muslim-majority Country." The forum is scheduled for 3-5 p.m. in the Gold Room (Room 2168) in the Rayburn House Office Building. The forum will coincide with the release of the Commission's latest publication [*Policy Focus on Bangladesh*](#), which includes recommendations for U.S. policy to advance respect for human rights in the world's third largest Muslim-majority country.

Featured speakers will include Ambassador (retired) **A. Tariq Karim**, former Ambassador of Bangladesh to the United States and currently a Harrison Fellow in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland, Mr.

Selig S. Harrison

, director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy and a senior scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Ms.

Cynthia R. Bunton

, regional program director for Asia at the International Republican Institute, and Mr.

Patrick Merloe

, senior associate at the National Democratic Institute.

USCIRF Chair **Felice D. Gaer**, Vice Chair **Michael Cromartie** and Commissioner **Preeta D. Bansal**, all of whom took part in a Commission delegation to Bangladesh in February-March of this year,

will participate in the forum.

Based on the delegation's discussions in Dhaka, the Commission is concerned that Bangladesh's upcoming national elections could be the occasion for a repeat of the anti-minority violence that marred the October 2001 elections, for the further advance of Islamic extremism in the country, and for the erosion for all Bangladeshis of legal protections of freedom of religion or belief and other universal human rights. The forum will discuss these concerns, the role of the United States in promoting democracy and respect for human rights in Bangladesh, and possible implications for U.S. policy elsewhere in the Muslim world. On October 28, a non-party Caretaker Government is scheduled to be installed in Bangladesh to administer the country during the three-month period preceding the national elections in January 2007.

WHAT: USCIRF Forum "The Bangladesh Elections: Promoting Democracy and Protecting Rights in a Muslim-majority Country"

WHEN: 3-5 p.m., Tuesday, October 17, 2006

WHERE: Gold Room (Room 2168), Rayburn House Office Building, located southwest of the Capitol on a block bounded by Independence Avenue, South Capitol Street, C Street, SW, and First Street SW.

RSVP: Angela Stephens, astephens@uscirf.gov , (202) 523-3240, x114

Please note : Signs and placards are prohibited at the forum.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

- Michael O. Gade

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